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Transcript of an interview with

Brad Ness

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INTERVIEWER: Kristen Marano

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## **Brad Ness**

Hi, my name's Brad Ness. Five-time Paralympian, dedicated a lot of my time to adaptive sport and now the head coach of the High Performance Wheelchair Basketball team in Perth, Western Australia.

## **Kristen Marano**

When you were just talking about boating, that reminded me of Rottneest. I know everyone probably asks you this, but I want to bring it up because it happened when you were a teenager. That's when we're all starting to begin our lives and figure out what we want to do with our careers and school. Can you take me back to that moment of what happened?

## **Brad Ness**

Yeah, I mean, do you want the whole package or the watered down one? Pardon the pun. But uh, look working back then. I took the job and this is no crack at the actual company at the time that we're working for, but safety wasn't a huge—it wasn't like it was now. So I went down, did a couple of days work experience. They asked me if I'd filled out a time card, said 'No.' So they filled out the time card from one of my days, work experience got me to do it for the other day. So I ended up getting paid for my work experience. And, you know, I had a job, you know, before I even realized I had a job sort of thing. And you just learn on the job.

The thing was, during summer we worked a lot of hours. We could work up to 80 hours a week, but because I was trying to make it playing Aussie Rules Football, it was good because it meant in winter I could not work as much. So you were happy to do the hours. What it meant was on this particular weekend, we used to do a double bubble, which they don't do anymore for obvious reasons, but we'd work morning and night, morning and night then have a day off. So the weekend of my accident, I'd actually logged 37 and a half hours in two days. Which doesn't give you a lot of time to sleep and being in the industry home. Now, the biggest thing is recovery and sleep is a big part of that. So yeah, if you're working that type of hours and they talk about, what's a stressful job, working with the general public, working with alcohol, working with elements, working off shore, you know, even though it seemed like a casual job were you are going to and from Rottneest or those things actually made our job quite dangerous, which we didn't really realise at the time.

So on this particular evening, we'd actually—it was on the back end of a double bubble—so we took off from Hillary's, went down to Fremantle, punched into the Freo Doctor the whole way down. So yeah, my job was sort of like Super Mario. You know, people you're just trying to read people's faces whether they were going to be sick or not, and make sure that they're looked after. We got to Freo in that afternoon, well that evening. So we'd worked the Rotto run all day and then we're doing like a night cruise. It was a Christmas cruise. So some people got off because they, they just didn't feel, didn't feel, like, they were feeling sick, basically. But other people got on. So we had Argyle Diamonds and Westpac and a few other people on board. And we took off over to the island. When we

got to the island and we went to pull in on our normal berthing, but there was some other boats that were there, because back then there was no real lighting to go to the island. They didn't want people coming to the island at night, cause it's dangerous with the reefs and stuff. So on a Friday afternoon sort of thing, everyone thought, 'Oh, that's it, the fairies aren't coming back'. But we were actually going back for like a chartered Christmas cruise. So it wasn't a problem. We went out to the end of the jetty and tied up there, which meant all our type lines went. What we normally would do, my job then was to swap into Maitre D-type scenario and take everyone up to the hotel for their Christmas party. So, you sort of jumping between roles and then come back and then I'm the most unpopular person trying to get, you know, 199 people out of the pub back onto a boat to go home.

If you like, that's been to the island, you understand Friday night beers are flowing. No one really wants to go home. So yeah, a bit of the old farmland came into play there, cattle prods, you know, get everyone on board. So, I've got everyone on board that night. It's pretty happy with that. Hadn't lost anyone. And then my job is then to switch back into almost being in the park break for the boat. So I tell the skipper to go into gear. The boat goes into gear and all the tension goes on my line. The forward ropes become slack so I'd make sure the deck hands jump on take those ropes off, I'd tell the skipper to bring the boat back. So he just takes it out a gear. So all that pressure on my line comes back. I climb through a window, take it off, take the rope off the bollard inside the boat.

That's when the problem started. Someone yelling out, 'Get us a beer' or anything like that sounds like my next command, which was 'All clear'. So the skipper thought he was all clear. I'm trying to get the rope off the jetty, I couldn't, because the boat's sort of moving away. I've got about four meters of line that's paying out through a, scupper hole, about so big. From trying to yell from the window and then from the stairwell, when I pivoted, I put my foot in the rope and it just tore my foot clean off, out through the scupper hole within a split second. You know, they say your life changes in a split second. I reckon it can change quicker. Cause I actually, you know, sort of saw it, I didn't have the time to get it out.

That's when a guy nicknamed Fridge grabbed me, cause I'm sitting there going, 'Oh, me leg, me leg'. Obviously looking down having no foot, I'm watching a couple of ladies faint, which is probably normal. And he grabbed me and he's called Fridge because he's just one of the biggest blokes I've ever come across. And he sort of held onto me and um, yeah, made sure I didn't go into shock and stuff like that. And obviously I had, and yeah, the rest is pretty crazy. A couple of people that were there dived in the water trying to find my foot, they couldn't find it though. They then realized if they found the foot, they didn't have ice. So they ran up to the pub and the first person they asked at the pub just happened to be my sister who was working there. So she's had to come down and she's on the back of the deck with me, which for me was a good thing, cause I had family there.

So I had someone to sorta, you know, comfort me. But you know, she had to sit through the whole thing, watching her baby brother, basically, you know, sit on the back deck.

They tell me you die within about five minutes from an accident like mine. The accident happened 11:30pm at night. I didn't get into the hospital until about two o'clock. So, and the reason being, we had a paramedics crew, like a response group on board from, I think from the mines, actually. And um, they grabbed the main artery and my groin, shut it off, took my belt off, tourniquet, took my shirt off, got some beer mats, whatever they could find to use to try and keep the blood loss to a minimum. And then, um, yeah, they ended up giving me a morphine shot, found some doctor late at night over there who could do it.

They couldn't get a chopper over or anything like that. So in the end the skipper was like, 'Right, we're going home'. So you know that the trip back was at least half an hour. So, um, for whatever reason, was I in the wrong place at the right time or the right place at the wrong time, that's a debatable question. Because you know, when I woke up, that happened Saturday night, they amputated back to just below the knee because I lost my foot completely. And um, yeah, sort of when I woke up, I was like, 'Oh, that's all that happened, you know, I'm still here'. So, um, yeah, forever grateful for the people that were on board that night because yeah, I shouldn't have probably shouldn't have got off the rock that night.

### **Kristen Marano**

Thank you for sharing that. You were 18 at the time?

### **Brad Ness**

I was 12 weeks into being 18. So, yeah, probably at that time, and look, you know what the best one I heard about it, you know, a lot of people say, 'Oh, how'd you get through it and everything'. A lot of friends come and saw me when I was in hospital and when I got out, um, they all stopped, stuck very close to me. So when I was having bad days, they sort of picked me up and kept me going. And um, yeah, pretty, probably pretty lucky. One, I was really fit at the time cause I was playing football and I was at an age where although we think we're 10 foot high and bulletproof, I was probably at the age where I was going to be able to cope and recover the best possible scenario. So I was lucky.

### **Kristen Marano**

When I was reading about your story and what happened, it made me think about how life can change in an instant. We never know what's going to happen. And sort of this idea of how we adapt and how we continue to move forward in life and, you know, reflecting on COVID-19, which has been a big situation for everyone as well, a lot of uncertainty in life. And so I was thinking of that theme and it's something that you've had to do for a big chunk of your life, but I guess it became your 'normal' as well at some point?

### **Brad Ness**

I mean, well, it's not, we're not lizards, it's not growing back. Some people accept things like this and others don't. I suppose the way I looked at it, I'd lost being able to play football, I suppose that was the hardest thing. Um, I didn't go near a football ground for a

couple of years. The club was really good. They gave me opportunities to be able to go back and be a part of that, it sorta took one of my good mates to debut in the AFL for St. Kilda for me to go back to a game. And then when I walked in, I was like, 'Yeah, I'm an idiot. Why have I been denying myself something that I love?'. And so I still love the footy and that now, but at that stage it was, you know, there's a lot of life to be lived. And like I've mentioned to you before, sometimes you've just got to stop and think and almost breathe and say, 'Okay, this is the obstacle in front of me,' or 'This is the situation.' And you sometimes go look outside the box and find a way, find a solution. And you know, I wanted to be a professional sportsman, I want to be a footballer. Well, I got to be a professional sportsman and it was in wheelchair basketball. Growing up on a wheat and sheep farm, that was the last thing I thought I'd be doing for, for a living. But I suppose when you look at it, I probably got a much longer career in sport from playing wheelchair basketball than I would have ever had playing football, because with the statistics and the percentages, I probably wouldn't have made it anyways. And to be honest, friends that have who made it, I walk better than they do now anyways. So, yeah there is a silver lining to it. But generally the way I attack life now. And is it because I had that accident? I'm not sure. But it's definitely a—you've got to look for the positives and I'm not saying there's always going to be that outcome, but I think sometimes we get too pigeonholed or we're channelled into doing the norm and not looking outside and seeing what other options there are.

### **Kristen Marano**

Well, I think now that you're in a coaching position, as well, for at least the last three years, right? Yeah. And through COVID you were sharing with me that you were able to then help a lot of your team members also work through the mental part of things. And that this time has been really emotionally hard.

### **Bred Ness**

It was the first sort of couple of weeks. It was a joy for them and not having to train and not be having to wake up and go through the hard yards and not feel sore and everything and they were like, 'Yeah, how good's this?' But that quickly turned to 'When can we come back?' Is 'conditions' the right word? I'm not sure, but when you are conditioned to that sort of lifestyle where you wake up every morning, go train dah, dah, dah. When you've had that taken away. It's a bit like when I had work taken away from me, you miss it, you know, your self worth is all of a sudden like, 'Well, what am I doing with myself?' But yeah, not being able to go back to work was the hardest thing for me because we spend so much time together.

They were like family anyway. And it's like these guys with their squad members, it's like, it's a big part of their social life as well. Even though they're training, it's, it's a social aspect of it as a team sport. That's why we played team sport. And so when that got taken away, that was the first thing that we had to try and adjust to. And we're still working through that now months later. So it was, 'How we keep them together?' was the first thing. And then also how do we give them something to aim towards? Because as an athlete, you're always aiming towards something, know there's always a goal there's, you know, there's

something that we're striving to achieve. So all of a sudden they couldn't train, they couldn't go outside. But the biggest thing for, especially with our guys with a disability was they couldn't just go down to the park.

And then all of a sudden if they're on a walkway there was, you know, tenfold more people because everybody was only able to do that. So that's what they were doing. So even trying to train, like trying to look for areas out different ways, that they could, became hard. So, you know, all of a sudden I'm getting videos of some of my athletes with bricks on their back doing pushups, and they'd got milk crates and filled them with sand and they were lifting up milk crates. Cause they were just trying to find ways of where they could train because they couldn't get to gyms that were adapted for themselves or, you know to walkways or parkways that were adapted for people with chairs. So yeah, it's been a challenge, but I think the biggest thing that's come out of this is people have actually, um, taken ownership of how they were to train and how to go about their business. So instead of going back to how we were before, we've adapted that into our training environment now, so that they've got some, um, yeah, they've got some ownership of what they've, what they did through COVID that we're now putting into their daily lives now, which has been a big thing.

### **Kristen Marano**

One of the things you mentioned was that one day a week, the team gets to choose how they want to train.

### **Brad Ness**

Yeah. Yeah. And yeah, I'm more like, I'm also saying to them, if they want to go away from your environment and do it, it's almost like not that we didn't trust it as we saw what they did through that lockdown phase. Um, so why not let them embrace that and do that? And the big thing is, is there is actually some positives to it, which we're finding out now they trained, when they worked out how to train, they train just as hard. But they're not having to spend that hour of travel or getting ready. So they get more recovery time at home. So even on that day where we say go away, do your own thing. They still get as much done, but they actually get more recovery and they feel then their wellbeing is better because they can plan their day, how they want to do it. Um, and they can achieve some other things outside of just our daily training environment. So yeah, it's been a big positive.

### **Kristen Marano**

I think it's really nice that you've listened to what they've said to you and have been willing to adapt. We talked about that adaptation sort of as a sense of resilience and how we move forward and how we do things now.

### **Brad Ness**

Yeah. I think you'll find people with a disability majority of the time we're pretty resilient in different phases just because they have to be, um, yeah. Society is changing a lot now, which is making it, um, sort of easier I suppose. But yeah, a lot of the guys there, they're very resilient in how they go about their daily lives and, um, they're very structured as

well. And I suppose you need to be because you can't just wake up and jump out of bed and jump into a car and go there. There's a lot of planning to go into all of that. So, it's been, I suppose, refreshing to see some of the things they've come up with themselves to adapt to COVID. There was a lot of concern because of some of their disabilities also makes them more susceptible to something like COVID just with respiratory you know, paraplegia and stuff like that. So there was a lot of concern from them that, 'Hey, we don't want to even go outside here at the moment. We're not going to risk going to a shop'. So it was great to see a couple of them get around each other. Some of them that had, you know, like an amputation or something like myself, they sort of got around and helped their teammates that were concerned. So it was refreshing to see that side of it as well. A more team orientated outlook on their lives to get to get through that period.

### **Kristen Marano**

Sounds like some nice friendships.

### **Brad Ness**

Yeah, no they're thinkers and they're unreal and that's the best part. And yeah, they learn off each other because some people come into it, their acquired disability might be through a car crash or something like that. So, you know, they're coming into a different, a whole different life at a stage and it's different. It's difficult to know the ins and outs, so they all get around and help each other. And, and yeah, it's been, it's been great seeing the way they've helped each other through COVID.

### **Kristen Marano**

One of the other things you also mentioned is, you know, trying to shift this mindset being at peak performance and yeah, no, we have another year ahead of us. You've said you're working with your team that rather than thinking ahead towards the Olympics, it's sort of like every day, how can I become better at what I'm doing or how can I become a better person and a better athlete?

### **Brad Ness**

Yeah. A hundred percent. It started off, I suppose, on a technical side. We are, I think, we're three weeks away now from what should have been opening ceremony. So we're in a stage where they are all up and about. Uh, we've just come through a 10-week really hard block of training, probably one of the hardest things they've done, you know. To the fact where we, we warned them at the start of it. I said, you're going to hate me at the end of this. And it's okay to hate me during this. Um, if you need a day off, let me know, because it is going to be tough at the end of it. When we did the test results, it was amazing to see how hard they had worked and the results we got back. So a big part of me was so upset because they had worked so hard for 10 weeks, then all of a sudden, bang, they're in lockdown and they couldn't train.

So that was, that was frustrating. And it was frustrating for the athletes. So especially, you know, like we're looking at Shaun Norris, he's the captain of the Australian team. This is his fifth Paralympics that he will be going to. And he actually hadn't had test results like

this since 2010. Yeah. So to have someone out there at the end of their career testing, like they were, when they started, that was frustrating. So, you know, to, to move forward on that, it's like, okay, we're not going to go to that situation again, maybe for another six, seven months. So the mindset is now, 'Hey, let's go away and you tell me what you want to work on'. And now let's take this time to, yeah, and it might not be so much on the court, it might be, you know, getting their NDIS plans in place so that, you know, for the next year, their goals, they can work towards their goals and they can get assistance to do that. And that might mean trying to work out how they can live out that because they haven't made the decision to live out of home because of Tokyo. Well now we've got the time to explore that. So let's explore it. And if that's going to make them a happier person, we're going to, when we need to drop the hammer and train hard again, they're gonna, their mindset hopefully is going to be in a place where that's going to be easy for them to do. Um, so yeah, we've been working a lot on that at the moment. Um, and then obviously on court spending more time on, on skills and yeah, the thing I'm saying to them is, 'Hey, let's not think' because before it was all about being better than another country. I'm now saying to them, 'Hey, in WA, we've got an opportunity to be better than the rest of Australia'. So, so let's work at being better on and off the court than everyone else. So when selection time comes, hopefully we don't get six or seven. We get eight or nine athletes to the games.

### **Kristen Marano**

What do you think are the advantages that we have in WA? We were talking about this on our call before; WA having some advantages over, even other countries. What do we have to work in our favour? What are some of the things you're noticing?

### **Brad Ness**

My wife always jokes, 'Oh most isolated city in the world, it takes so long to get anywhere'. I think now we're seeing now maybe the only advantage to being the most isolated city in the world is that we're, you know, whether right or wrong, they've shut the borders and we can move around. We can train, like, we were very fortunate. Wheelchair basketball was one of the first sports programs back up and running post-COVID. Um, yeah, we had a ball machine, so I could train one athlete at a time. So again, you're talk about looking for ways around a problem or an obstacle. Post-COVID, we went back so we could get the athletes back, cause they were just chomping at the bit. I had to go one athlete at a time. I had to select four balls out of a basket, wipe them down and put them in the ball machine. They could shoot, they could push their chair, but I couldn't go near them. I couldn't touch the balls. But because it was a ball machine with the automatic rebound, so I'd do one athlete at a time. So my coaching day went from, say, two hours a day to seven hours a day, but we got through it and then enabled them to get back and get training. So we got the jump on the rest of Australia by probably a month, maybe more. Um, and now we're seeing people back in lockdown and we're back training, like, there's no problems. We have full contact with scrimmaging and we're able to do what we want to do. So the advantages for us is we're able to train no problems and we've been able to put blocks and stuff together, so that if tomorrow there is a training camp, they keep getting canceled at the moment. So everything's shifting. So the advantage for us is that, although the structure of what we would normally have keeps changing, our own internal

structure keeps going. So we're ticking along where we're ticking the boxes we need to do so that when the opportunity presents itself, to be able to go for selection or go on a tour, I'm hoping that we might have more athletes available for the national teams than normal, you know, living in Western Australia.

My wife has a restaurant, you know, where we were able to go through takeaway during COVID. So we didn't have to sack all our staff. We were able to keep the doors open. Um, from that we've gained more clients because of people looking for takeaway meals. So when we've kicked the doors open, I was actually concerned that, um, trade would go down and instead it's gone the other way because we've had more people exposed to the restaurant. And we're ticking along as normal now. Um, yeah, there's been some protocols that you have to implement because of COVID, but you know, looking at the east coast, they're now back in a lockdown and an industry such as hospitality are going to suffer again. So the advantages of WA, I suppose we always sorta, you know, we joke about cutting ourselves off from the rest of Australia and stuff. But we're seeing now that yeah, for however long, who knows, we can actually sustain ourselves as a region, as a state. Which is where I suppose we're probably one of the only places in the world that is in this position at the moment.

### **Kristen Marano**

I'm very curious to hear from you on this. I've been thinking about this idea, that I hope the Olympics will go ahead, but sort of, now that teams can't be competing in Europe and having different championships to help prepare for the Olympics, I started thinking about what does professional sport look like without the Olympics potentially. And you know, what would that look like in the future? And it's sort of what you said, do we keep the sport within Australia or Asia Pacific?

### **Brad Ness**

We're sort of faced now, in our sport, wheelchair basketball, we're sort of in the driver's seat because everyone else around the world are being shut down and they're still suffering from that. Um, but the European competitions, they want to start them up again. So they'll end up getting competitions. Whereas we're in a position where we don't know when the competition is going to start again, because internally in Australia, it's blocked. So is it a good thing where we can still train, but we're not getting the competition. Whereas people in Europe at the moment, they can't really train, but there is competition on the horizon in terms of the Olympics for professional sport, anything that has got TV rights, like the NBA, your cricket, um, you know, like they're talking about cutting out the world cup or they're going to have the IPL. So athletes are still going to be able to perform, there's going to be TV, so that's going to go ahead. I think what sport's going to look like moving forward is that we're going to get used to not seeing crowds. Um, we'll still be able to see the, you know, the fact that the AFL put crowd noise in. I think it was great. Cause then when you're sitting at home, you can, you sort of still got the ambience of the game, but yeah, I think we're going to have to get used to a lot more of, of not seeing crowds at events. Events will probably go on, but if you're asking me whether Tokyo will go on, I'm really sceptical. You live in hope. And you've got to keep everyone upbeat and training

and stuff. And your daily environments, but you know, that's going to be a big ask, um to put 10,000 athletes in athletes village, and to put 80,000 or a hundred thousand people in a stadium. That's going to be, you know, look, I think if there's any country that can pull that off, it'll be the Japanese, with just how efficient they are. I was lucky enough to tour Japan three years running, leading into this year, just to see. I mean, the stadiums were already built, you know, they'd put in new infrastructure for travel, um, you know, commuting in and around Tokyo. It was amazing what they had done. So if anyone can do it, they can do it. But, um, it's going to be tough. And, and for the people like your athletics, your sailors, for people that live for the Olympics, there's going to be really, really hard to, you know, take that onboard and say, 'Hey, we're not going to be able to compete next year.' Because it's a four-year swing. And a lot of people, you know, to do multiple Paralympics or Olympics, or to do one is unbelievable, to do two or more, the percentage of that is really low. So for a lot of people they're gonna have their dream taken away from them. And then it goes back to what we were talking about before their self-worth. What is it? You know, a lot of people suffer coming out post-games because they put so much into competing for that 10 seconds, 40 seconds, whatever it might be. And then they have sort of nothing past that, you know, I'd hate to be in someone's shoes where they've dedicated their life or a big part of their life to getting to that event. And then it's taken away from them. That would be really hard to comprehend.

### **Kristen Marano**

You have five Paralympics behind you. So it's sort of, I would imagine you have some good perspective that you're able to share with your team to have conversations now around perhaps being more present day to day versus thinking so much ahead and being focused on the Olympics?

### **Brad Ness**

We're being questioned on why we were training like we were here in WA. And one thing is, well, this is our norm. So why do we, you know, we don't, we shouldn't change it too much, but my, my response was, well not everyone's a walk-up start. So even though the games have been postponed a year, it's given opportunity to a couple of our players now who probably they're developing the they're the young guys coming through. And, uh, there's a girl there as well. My squad's mixed. So in training we mix the men and the women together to play, um, which is pretty unique and cool thing I suppose. Um, but we've got a couple of athletes there that would have missed Tokyo if it was held in three weeks' time. But now that it's in a year's time, they've actually got a really good opportunity to make that team. Uh, so their goal is not so much Tokyo in August next year. It's actually being selected in February. So when we look at it that way, um, yeah, I'm saying to them, 'Hey, train now for that, if you make it awesome, we'll deal with that'. It doesn't matter how hard you train afterwards, you've missed the boat. So let's not look at this as 12-13 months out. We've got to look at this as we're now training for this and what are we going to do daily to, to achieve that. And I suppose that's why I've gone back to allowing them to have a bit of freedom with what they want to do so that we can still train at the level we need to, even though we don't know what's ahead of us. So they still have a little bit, like, I'm trying to keep an element of fun there. So they do train hard, but they still have their, I suppose, their daily part that they enjoy. And then look, if we get to February-March and

things change again, we'll deal with it, but you can't, you can't focus that far ahead. You're got to focus on today and what you can do. Like I said, on and off the court, how can you be better person to be able to be ready in February when they start selecting teams.

**Kristen Marano**

Well, that was going to be my next question. How important is it to you that all of your team members are doing things outside of the sport?

**Brad Ness**

Yeah, I've missed weddings, I've miss funerals, I even cut my own honeymoon short which I still—I said I'd make up. That was a long time ago. All because of basketball. I suppose if anything that I can put back to the athletes now is, Hey, yeah. Well, I mean, there's a big emphasis on balance and stuff, but let's be honest. You're trying for a Paralympics, you can't have too much of an equal balance. You've got to train, you've got to be hard, um, and dedicated to it. But at the same time you need something. Me personally, I'm not someone that you go, 'Hey, you can have 50-50'. Um, because you just can't, you've got to respect the fact that you're going to be the best in the world. That's what you're aiming at. So you need to dedicate a fair bit of time and energy towards that. So we do work hard. Especially with WAIS, with the Athlete Wellness Officer to say, 'Hey, what is it that you're doing outside? Are you doing one unit? Are you working part time or one day a week?' And if work or uni gets in the way of a session, I'm happy to facilitate that because I do think it's really important. We actually have post-COVID, talk about how things change, one of our guys finished his training at 9:00am and he's sitting there sweating in his training kit, but he's got his phone and he's on a Zoom conference for work. Cause they check in at nine o'clock and a big part of their thing is they are all working from home. So yeah, we facilitate that. I'll make sure he's off the court in time to be able to take that course. So that enables him to train. Um, but he also gets a bit of work done at the same time. So something like that, you know, just working through those sorts of things and making sure you're accommodating to them has helped a lot in the last couple of months

**Kristen Marano**

It sounds like really good support.

**Brad Ness**

Yeah. They need to have something else because if anything, it takes, takes your mind off being fixated on it. You just need that little bit of escape. Yeah.

**Kristen Marano**

What have you been learning about yourself during this time?

**Brad Ness**

Patience. It's, I suppose I'm evolving as a coach, I'm learning all the time. I suppose the game I understand, but the programming and working and actually having to manage, it's easy to manage itself as an athlete, you make the decision to get up and train. If the alarm

goes off, do you push snooze? Or you don't. That's your decision. Whereas you can't do that as a coach. You've got to be there every day because you've got, you know, at the moment I've got up to 15 athletes that turn up every morning, so you've got to be there. But the biggest thing is having the patience to work with, with everyone with everything that's going on because everyone's being effected differently with COVID. Like I said, some people with a high disability don't want to be anywhere near people. They won't go to shops or they won't go to anything. So, you know, just working through everyone's individual needs as a coach has been for me a little bit challenging, but I'm starting to understand it and I suppose functioning with it a lot better. So yeah, having that and like, when we got our first camp cancelled, I was angry. Cause you know, you want to just go and allow these guys cause they've trained so hard to go and put on show what they've been doing. So yeah, having just now having the patients to say, 'Hey, we don't know when we're going to be able to train at an international level again'. So we just gotta keep controlling what we can control. And that's being here in WA.

### **Kristen Marano**

We were talking about resilience, in our last conversation and it's a word and a theme that's being talked about a lot and thrown around a lot. What does that mean for you as a person or as a coach?

### **Brad Ness**

I suppose when people hear my story, they go, 'Oh, you're so resilient'. I think we're all born with resilience. I think everyone's got it inside of them. Sometimes it just takes an event in someone's life to bring that out and it's a powerful thing. But I do believe we've all got it inside of us and it's just about how do you tap into it? How do you harness it and use it for an advantage. Cause basically if you're resilient, it's a hard thing, with me it was more, with life it was like I didn't want to lose what I had. So I had to get, you know, get back on the horse, so to speak. I suppose, with my resilience or with what I see with the athletes every day, it's showing people that they don't go out of their way to be resilient. It's just the way they are, they have to be to get through to the end of the day. And that's where I was at the start, when I first lost my foot, it was, you know, 'Let's just focus on getting through to the end of the day'. And sometimes people say you can't do that. Like for me, the police turned up and took my license off me and all of a sudden I couldn't drive. I grew up on a farm. I'd been driving all my life. So to lose my license, it was, 'Okay, well, how do I get it back?' You know? And working my way through that. And I suppose, so they're little things like that, that build up and all of a sudden people are looking and going, 'Oh, you're really resilient'. But I'm like, 'Hang on now, it's just the events of my life that have shaped me'. But, I suppose not accepting 'No, you can't do something'. Like I said, sometimes you just gotta stop and it's more a focus thing it's looking outside of what's in front of you and saying, how do I get around that? People look at that as being resilient. I just look at it as life. You've just got to. It's how you move forward in life and not accepting something as a barrier or as an obstacle for you. That's going to stop you doing what you want to do. You know, I talk to kids and say, 'Yeah, if you want to be a fireman or whatever it is you want to be, there's nothing stopping you from doing that'. I suppose it's just living your dream. With me, I wanted to be a sportsman and I did it through

basketball. Is that being resilient? Maybe it's just following your dreams and working hard to get there.

### **Logan Griffiths**

How did you go from, 'I'm going to play for Carlton to basketball?' Were you interested in basketball before?

### **Brad Ness**

I played a little bit, socially. Being from a country town you sorta do all sports. The thing was I started swimming to try and keep fit after my accident. I'd swim at school and stuff and didn't really want to go back to those sort of mornings. I ended up getting my skippers ticket. I ended up going back to work. I went back to the boat within six months of my accident, and was working. So, um, I'd sort of gone down that path and then I was missing the one thing I loved, and that was sport. I did play one game of football after my accident. Um, from there, there was an article, a guy saw it. And one of the things I say to people is you've got to give people the respect, like you guys listen to my story today, which, you know, thank you for allowing me to tell it. This old guy kept ringing the house and I wouldn't, I was just like, 'Nah'. Dad was like, 'No, he's not interested'. Turned out he was one of our original Paralympians from 1960 who was trying to get me to come and play wheelchair basketball. So in the end to stop him from pestering me, I was like, 'Right, I'll give this a go'. I was out on court for a couple of minutes. Some guy come through, cleaned me up. I got back in my chair, seeing red. And I was like, 'That can't be legal'. And they're like, 'No, Brad it's legal'. So I spent the next couple of hours pushing out, trying to catch him. Couldn't catch him. I was like, 'Right. I gotta learn how to use a wheelchair.' And I found my sport. It was a team sport you could bash into each other. And yeah, I loved it. I think it's so different to basketball, but it's so similar, but it's the 'so different' part that's so cool about it. The only way I can explain it is if you chuck a basketball into bumper cars at The Royal Show, that gives you some sort of, yeah, you laugh, but that's the joy that I get from it. You can get out there and you're bashing each other. And it's just a lot of fun.

### **Mason Vellios**

I have to say, because I've seen documentaries on the four year lead up to building the infrastructure for an Olympics. And most of them are like still scraping walls. And you know, the buildings are not even to code within weeks prior and it's like a mad rush. So that means probably going to be really good.

### **Brad Ness**

Yeah. I think if you wanted two of the countries, you'd probably pick Germany or Japan. I always say the Olympics are the test event to the Paralympics because the Olympics go first and all the things that go wrong, get ironed out for us in the Paralympics. So we're lucky in that sense. So if you look at it this way, and yeah, look, it's not a bad thing that it's been postponed for a year if for whatever reason. And obviously COVID was the reason that it's been postponed, then yeah, why not postpone it for a year and get it right. Um, we know everything's been built, the village has been finished. So now they've just

got more time to prepare it, to have them have us here. That's why I think they may be able to get it done.

**END OF INTERVIEW.**